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ABSTRACT

Black and white counselors in South Africa live in legally predetermined separate worlds highly charged with emotion. Professional neutrality in such a circumstance would be a myth. Counselors are charged on ethical grounds to address the effects on the client and themselves of the socio-political condition. Failure to do so, even at that level, would be to perpetuate the authoritarian social structures. Of utmost importance is the counselors' readiness to recognize the existence of emotionally distorted reactions in themselves. They must be willing to examine their prejudiced perceptions of the client and be ready to work through the distortions. The counselors should acquaint themselves with the dynamics of racial prejudice to promote self-awareness. If black and white counselors would stop feigning political virginity, they could extend themselves outwardly to understand each other's values. If, by being proactive, they would bridge the fissures in the social systems and facilitate a national culture based on inter-individual understanding and acceptance, black and white counseling would be a possibility in South Africa. (ABL)

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IS BLACK-WHITE COUNSELLING A POSSIBILITY IN SOUTH-AFRICA

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INTRODUCTION

The Oxford advanced dictionary explains the act of oppression as 'rule unjustly or cruelly keep down by unjust or cruel government, weigh heavily on, cause to feel troubled, uncomfortable. The explanation clearly depicts the act of oppression as transcending cultural, specifications. We are, each one of us, human-beings who are in constant dialogal relationships with the world and at the same time forming, each one of us, a part of the world that can be experienced by other persons.

"each person is always acting upon others and acted upon by others"

(Laing, 1982, p. 81)

Therefore, we all have been on the flip side of the oppression coin. In varying degrees, at different times, in a whole spectrum of circumstances we have experienced oppression and in the same vein we have consciously or unconsciously caused others to experience it. This view focuses on oppression as a human condition which finds expression in the people environment. Man can, therefore, pattern this human condition into a national culture and the South African government's political creed 'apartheid' bears testimony to my assertion. What is peculiar to the South African situation is that apartheid which is the doctrine of racial distinction is not a state bureaucracy to which people have agreed to submit. (Vontress, 1988) but rather a legislative imposition on the black people of that country by the white minority in power to guarantee white supremacy.

"South Africa is an authoritarian society embodying considerable formal

powers of coercion, sustained not only by powerful and far-reaching laws against subversion but also by administrative action by the security police outside the scope of the courts"

(Schlemmer, 1978, p. 160)

THE APARTHEID POLICY

Blacks in South Africa are exposed to dominative behaviour by whites and the master-servant relationship is legally perpetuated (Mathabe 1988).

The focus of this paper is on the South African black experience and its implications in a black-white counselling scenario. To understand this experience, a delineation of the overall framework of meaning structures within which the particular experiences take place seems necessary. The stronghold of 'apartheid' is the political system within which all other systems operate and from which we blacks are denied active participation. Blacks are excluded from the parliamentary franchise and we have all matters pertaining to our lives decided for us by powerful others. All systems that form the pulse of any government are in South Africa experienced by us blacks as loaded in favour of whites. We do not have political rights.

Legislation: 'Apartheid' is committed to racial segregation with the aim of maintaining white supremacy. A structure of laws has thus been designed to guarantee the hierarchical ordering of the South African society. Whites are accorded privileges which are legislated and institutionalized when blacks have sometimes been defined by government as non-citizens. There is also repressive legislation to mute expression of discontent with the status quo.

Group Areas Act: Segregation of the races is ensured by residential segregation. Blacks are removed from white city-centre areas to townships. The group areas act defines residential areas for all race groups and empowers custodians of the law to evict 'illegals' from particular zones. Needless to say, whites are favoured with the best areas where they have easy access to all amenities of modern living.

Education: Educational facilities are inadequate for blacks. The level of financing black education relative to whites per-capita, is very low and has not been improved in recent years. In 1968 it was 6,4% of the white figure, and 6,5% in 1975. (Schlemmer 1978).

Education is the heart-beat of socio-economic development and varied feelings have been expressed regarding the intake of blacks recently in some 'open' educational institutions. Jacques Kriel (1989) maintains that

> "There is a widespread fear among whites that open education - whether at school, university or technikon - inevitably leads to a lowering of educational standards because of social, cultural and educational differences between the children or students"

The minister of national education Mr F.W. de Klerk addressing a conference of teachers and parents associations said that

> "the government was irrevocably committed to the concept that education was an own affair of each group ... this would remain as long as people demonstrated a will for it."

This statement obviously excludes us Blacks as our 'willing' is precluded by law and we can, therefore, not have the luxury of 'own affair'.

EFFECTS OF 'APARTHEID'

The Carnegie Inquiry into Poverty and Development in Southern Africa revealed details about the incidence and prevalence of poverty in which sixty percent of the black South African population was affected. Wilson and Ramphele (1989) saw poverty in South Africa as the direct result of the 'apartheid' policy. According to the authors, the problem of poverty can only be dealt with adequately if the political process accompanying it were addressed.

Blacks have been subjected to job inequality with concomitant low wages. They have had to experience the humiliating **need** to work under very undignified conditions. In fact, the institutionalized degradation of the black community permeates all aspects of their lives resulting in a systematic loss of human dignity, feelings of inferiority, subservience, inassertiveness and possible self-hatred.

The indignities accorded blacks have generated cultural arrogance in some whites who see integration as a black towards white linear mobility. They have answers to the race problem and cannot perceive blacks as ever capable of decisive thought without white control.

The far-reaching laming effects of the separatist system are put into relief by the remarks of a white Social Worker in a management position of services rendered to all race groups

"The impact of the differentiated system is therefore a reality to all employed in this context. As a manager of a service to all race groups the impact is even more of a reality. Firstly, when confronted with any situation before action can be taken the first consideration is the "colour" of the situation. Each race group has its own State Department (welfare is an own affair), each with it's own policy (differing), each with its own structure (differing) and each with its own set of resources (unequal)."

REACTION OF BLACKS TO 'APARTHEID'

Coercive rules and regulations have for a considerable time inhibited expression of the resentment the black people felt towards white imposed separatist policies. This was evidenced particularly in the years 1961 to 1973. During that period South Africa projected a picture of an almost sedative calmness, a period during which people seemed to just soak it all up, wrong becoming right. Van Zyl Slabbert (1989). This, however, did not mean acceptance or support. It was 'latent' resentment and after years of suffering rejection, alienation and frustration the resentment found expression in confrontations between the black youth and state authorities in 1976. The youth had developed a high political consciousness which led to raised expectations. They found it meet to assert their right to dignity, they fought for political rights for economic rights and expressed pride in their history and their traditions. The government and white people generally were perceived as intentionally creating structures which withheld from them , that which they were rightly entitled to. Whites were regarded with suspicion and mistrust.

Such feelings are depicted in the following extracts from assignments written by Social Work students:

i. It is also the case with whites. White workers like to treat white clients because they regard the blacks as inferior to them. They regard their race as superior to others.

ii. Whites, since they are in power in South Africa, they feel that they are the only human beings and blacks are not. It is disappointing to find that white workers are practising power and authority in the helping process forgetting that this attitude creates fear and confusion in the client. The black client will always be suspicious of whether a white worker will really help him and since he is white and has that bully feeling.

Blacks in South Africa experience intense feelings of frustration because of the present government policies. However, there continues to be widespread resistance against these policies and continued implementation of the policies generate feelings of anger, hostility, hatred and aggression.

THE EROSION OF APARTHEID

There has been open acknowledgement by government in recent years, that there is statutory racial discrimination in South Africa and that time has come that black people should be regarded and treated as human-beings and not as labour units.

P.W. Botha has on repeated occasions in his public addresses declared the urgency for change in South Africa, to adapt to the changing world or perish ... 'the moment you start oppressing people .. they fight back ... We must acknowledge people's rights and ... make ourselves free by giving to other in a spirit of justice what we demand for ourselves'. (Botha in Lipton, 1986, p. 51) These declarations have had a significant impact on black expectations. Despite some erosion of the hierarchical race structure by granting some rights to blacks, for example full trade union rights, changes in the wage policy, relaxing of job and education bars, the changes have been heralded with mixed feelings. Reform is clearly in the socio-economic sphere and apartheid is still strongly maintained in the political arena. Changes are perceived as not fundamental because they do not touch the decision-making ambit. The selective reform is interpreted as a self-serving strategy by the government which would like to co-opt people without losing control.

> "The government's central response to the basic political conflict in South Africa, however, remains the policy of separate development, in large part an attempt to deflect the aspirations of Africans away from the common society and to contain African political activity within separate ethnic areas"
>
> (Schlemmer, 1978, p.172)

The apparent structural changes have just succeeded in fanning vehement antagonism particularly in progressive political organizations.

IMPLICATIONS FOR BLACK-WHITE COUNSELLING

It is clear that the South African political thrust has generated deeply running feelings of

bitterness in the black people of that country. Whites are regarded with suspicion as they are perceived as deliberately withholding what rightfully belongs to blacks. There is a general feeling of inferiority and self-doubt in the blacks, fostered by government policies. The enforced segregation of the different races allows only for casual contact.

> "Casual contact by definition offers no occassion for the participants to regard each other not as members of a group. The main effect of such contact is the strengthening of stereotypes."
>
> (Mathabe, 1988, p. 20)

The Separate Amenities Act which serves to control casual contact seems to endorse the stereotypic belief in whites of black inferiority because it dictates separate but unequal amenities, with black interests at the lower end of the scale.

The gulf between black and white is further deepened by cultural differences.

With all the socio-political and cultural problems outlined would black and white counselling be possible in the South African context?

Barriers to effective black-white counselling in South Africa

Blacks and whites in South Africa have limited and in some cases no factual information concerning each other's experiential worlds because of the legally enforced racial segregation. They have both developed attitudes towards each other based on group membership. Whilst whites overtly express their stereotypic perception of blacks as inferior, blacks harbour hostile feelings against the white bogey-man stereotype. The two, in black-white counselling encounters, each one

as a counsellor, could easily denigrate the other's world view and experience and engage in communication that would devaluate the client's meaning structures. Such a situation could even render attempts at communication impotent.

South African counsellors are trained according to Western counselling philosophies, which focus on the self. Emphasis is placed on the self and counselling is a one to one encounter. A white counsellor, feeling anxious about dealing with a black client on an individual basis may resort to stereotypes and ignore what could be the psychopathogenic effects of the socio-political conditions. His/her guilt feelings, if any, about being a member of the dominant and domineering group will be allayed.

Some of the counsellor expectations of the client are trust and openness. Race relations in South Africa have fostered distrust of the other group and members of the external group are always perceived as enemies and thus untrustworthy. The client would therefore, be cautious of revealing his/her true feelings to the 'enemy' counsellor. This stance may render the counselling process impotent.

These barriers will be exacerbated by cultural factors such as language and ethnic values.

CONCLUSION

Black and white counsellors in South Africa live in legally pre-determined separate worlds highly charged with emotion. Professional neutrality in such a circumstance would be a myth. Counsellors are charged on ethnical grounds to address the effects on the client and themselves of the socio-political condition. Failure to do so, even at that level, would be to perpetuate the authoritarian social structures.

Of utmost importance, is the counsellors readiness to recognise the existence of emotionally distorted reactions in themselves. They must be willing to examine their prejudiced perceptions of the client and be ready to work through the distortions.

The counsellors should acquaint themselves with the dynamics of racial prejudice to promote self-awareness.

If black and white counsellors would stop feigning political virginity and develop an awareness of and readiness to analyse resistances and stereotypes, if they could extend themselves outwardly to understand each other's ethos. If, by being pro-active they would bridge the yawning fissures in our social systems and facilitate a national culture based on inter-individual understanding and acceptance - yes, black-white counselling would be a possibility in South Africa.

FOOT-NOTES

1. Page 1 . **Apartheid:** the system of legalised and institutionalized race discrimination and segregation in South Africa

2. Page 3 . **Township: Black** residential areas with urban influence

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